



104: Carry Her Weight by cali-chan

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Those fleeting few days between winter and spring when it wasn't snowing anymore but it wasn't raining yet either had finally arrived. At least that's how Hopper had described them; El had never really experienced them first-hand, always stuck inside either the lab or, as of last year, Hopper's cabin in the woods.

Even though Hopper had agreed that she was allowed a bit more freedom after the events of the previous fall, it was still too dangerous for her to go out on her own, so even though she could chronicle the positive change in the weather from her window, it wasn't the same as actually being out there and enjoying it. Her friends had mentioned that a break from school was coming up soon for them, so she had that to look forward to, at least, and Hopper had promised to take her around for a ride on the Blazer soon, but he couldn't do that during the week because he had to work. By Friday El was feeling as cooped up and frustrated as she had all winter, but at the same time she was resigned to having to wait in order to do anything fun.

Which is why she was so surprised to hear the secret knock that afternoon, and even more so to find Mike and his little sister Holly on the other side of the door. Turns out, their mother's book club meeting was taking place earlier than usual (a book club was a group of moms who all chose one book to read for the month and then got together to talk about it, Mike explained), and so Mike had been instructed to take his little sister out to play while she was out. Granted, Karen had probably meant for him to take her to a park or something, but Mike had decided if she hadn't specified a particular place then he could take her anywhere he wanted, and if he got to

spend some time with his girlfriend while at it, then all the better, right?

So it was a good surprise, El figured, especially when Mike eagerly urged her to put on some warmer outerwear— they were going to explore the forest. El pondered for a moment if they should go; Hopper wouldn't like it if he came back and found that she'd gone out without permission. But the idea of spending the day with Mike—and spending it *outside*— was too much of a siren song for her not to run to get her things with a beaming smile on her face.

So away they went, walking side by side through the trees behind the cabin, close enough that the fabric covering their arms brushed whenever one of them took a step forward. Holly held onto Mike's hand on the opposite side of Eleven so she wouldn't wander off, although she kept making them stop every few yards when she came across a flower she wanted to pick.

Finally, by the time Holly's arms were so full of budding blossoms that she could easily pass as a flower girl at a wedding, they made it to a small creek not too far from where they started, but isolated enough that it would be hard for anyone to just happen to walk by and find them.

The little girl promptly let go of Mike's hand and haughtily declared, "I'm gonna make a flower crown!" before taking sharp strides toward the foot of a large pine tree.

"Don't be so loud," Mike warned her, which she pointedly ignored as she sat down by the tree and dumped all the buds she had picked on her lap. They went well with the sparkly pink of her *Care Bears* tennis shoes. "You want me to teach you how to make one?"

"I know how to make a flower crown!" the little blonde shot back, glaring at her older brother with puffed cheeks and then proceeding to stick her tongue out at him. El frowned, a bit worried. She didn't have a sibling, but she knew from her experience with Hopper over the past year and a half that when families argued, making things right again usually involved a lot of hugs, conversation and possibly a triple-decker Eggo extravaganza or two. She wondered if Mike had enough Eggos at home for that.

He must've noticed her expression because he shook his head as if dismissing Holly's tantrum. "She doesn't know how to make a flower crown," he explained. "She's just mad because I refused to give her a piggyback ride this morning. But don't worry, she'll get over it soon enough."

She nodded, understanding that maybe this sudden conflict between Mike and Holly wasn't as serious as her worst arguments with Hopper had been. But still, something Mike had mentioned piqued her curiosity. "What's a piggyback ride?" she asked, wondering if this was one of those things that sounded like something gross but really wasn't. Dustin used a lot of those, and sometimes Mike and the others got really flustered when she asked, but she figured it was better to ask and weather the embarrassment when it was just them than risk accidentally using some weird, unwittingly offensive expression in front of Hopper.

"Ah, it's when you carry someone on your back," Mike explained quickly and simply. Eleven nodded. She'd seen Lucas carry Max around that way a few times, she just didn't know that kind of thing had a name. "You wanna try it?" Mike offered with a willing smile. El thought that sounded like fun, but she wasn't sure this would be the right moment.

She bit her lip as she looked between Mike and the little girl now attempting to string together wildflowers just a few feet away from them. "Won't Holly be upset?" she asked warily.

Mike snuck a peek at his sister, who looked wholly unconcerned by anything they were saying or doing, focused as she was on making a flower crown. Her tongue stuck out the corner of her mouth as she concentrated on joining the stems (and failed repeatedly), which Eleven thought was adorable. "Nah, it'll be fine. I'll just give her a ride, too, right after, and I'll be back in her good graces straight away." He turned around, his back to her. "Come on, I'll show you how to hang on."

El still hesitated. Truth be told, it wasn't really the Holly situation she was worried about. "Sure you can carry me?" she asked, cautious. The last time someone her age had carried her, it had to be Dustin because Mike simply couldn't support her weight. Granted, he'd been

twelve at the time, but...

He seemed to be recalling the exact same incident because he looked at her over his shoulder and rolled his eyes. "It's easier when it's on your back," he assured her pointedly, extending a hand out toward her. "Come on, stop stalling." She hesitated for a second longer but eventually decided to go with it, taking his hand and letting him pull her closer.

"Now, you put your arms around my shoulders like this." He guided her movements as he spoke, and Eleven immediately regretted her earlier faltering because as far as she was concerned, any activity that required her wrapping her arms around her boyfriend was a good idea. Even if the mechanics of it were a little complicated. "So when I stand up, you're going to wrap your legs around me, too, and I'll hold you up by your thighs. Okay?"

El nodded. "Don't drop me," she warned him.

"I won't." Mike started counting down so she could prepare for the shift in posture. "Okay. One... two... three!" He heaved and huffed a little as he pushed himself to his feet, wobbling only a little as El—unable to keep herself from letting out a squeal at the sensation of her center of gravity shifting so abruptly—wrapped every available appendage around him to keep her precarious position as steady as possible.

Mike laughed at her repeated yelping. "There," he declared. "I'm giving you a piggyback ride. See? That wasn't so hard."

He moved to take a step and El let out a squawk right into his ear. "Don't walk!" she pleaded, but at the same time she was laughing, because this whole piggyback thing was just fun. She loved the swooping feeling of instability in the pit of her tummy, but she also felt safe and comfortable because it was Mike who was carrying her weight.

"I'm just moving a little closer to the stream!" he retorted, laughing right along with her. "Don't yell in my ear, you're gonna make me lose balance," he warned as he took a step forward. And another. And another. El's elbows jostled against the corner of his shoulders every

time he moved.

She rested the side of face against his. "This is fun," she whispered in his ear instead, nuzzling a little against his dark hair; it tickled her cheek, but she didn't mind.

"Yeah," he agreed, turning his head a little so he could give her a smile. "We should do this more often now that the weather's getting better, don't you think? I'm sure as long as we're not around people, Hopper would be okay with— whoa!" That was as far as he got before tripping on a loose stone, and next thing El knew, they were both tipping forward toward the ground, and since her instinctive reaction was to hold onto him even tighter, she had no time to even think of using her powers to stop their momentum.

"Oomph!" Mike huffed as he fell, putting his arms up barely in time to keep himself from smacking face-first into the dirt. That was followed by a loud "Augh!" as El's own weight pushed him flat into the ground, and he ended up pancaked between her and the sparse grass. It was lucky that they hadn't actually made it to the side of the creek, because this spot where Mike tripped was dirty, but not muddy. Mike's jumper would've gotten ruined.

"Oh!" El exclaimed once the shock wore off. She quickly moved off Mike and to the side, leaning down to check on him. "Are you okay? Does something hurt?" she asked worriedly.

"I'm okay," Mike assured her, his voice muffled because his face was still smooshed against his arms. El felt a little less anxious when she saw him start to move, pushing his weight up against his forearms. His sweater was, as expected, a little dirty, but nothing that couldn't just be patted out of the fabric. "And for the record," he started with a groan as he pushed himself to his knees, "I didn't drop you, I just fell."

El nodded with an amused smile. "Very different," she declared before leaning forward to give him a kiss on the cheek.

He smiled at her gratefully. "So that's a piggyback ride! Minus the face dive at the end, of course," he added, chuckling. Then he turned to Holly, who Eleven just noticed had approached them in the interim, probably concerned when she saw them fall down. "You

want one, Holls?"

The little girl gave the two of them— still kneeling on the dirty ground— a mistrustful look like she thought the question was very obviously dumb. "No, thank you," she said quickly, shaking her head emphatically. Flower petals fell from her hair as she did so. Mike laughed. "Look, I'm a princess!" she exclaimed, pointing to the flowers in her hair. They weren't weaved together— it seems Mike had been right when he said Holly didn't know how to make a flower crown— but instead she'd just stuck them by the stems into her hair, which was pulled tightly into two pigtails.

"You look really pretty," El said, giving Holly a sincere smile.

The girl beamed at her. "Thank you!" She picked up one of the buds that had fallen off her head a moment ago. "Here," said, handing it to El, who grabbed it delicately off her hand. "You'll look pretty, too."

"Thanks," El replied, bringing the small white flower toward her so she could put it behind her ear. She couldn't see it for herself, but she hoped it looked okay. At least she was pretty sure it would stand out against the brown of her hair. Holly nodded as if satisfied, and went off to do whatever it was she wanted to do now that her flower crown was "finished."

Mike stretched out a hand to touch the flower softly, careful not to make it fall out of place. "She's right, you know." His gaze met hers for a second before he ducked his head bashfully, making it so he was looking down at his other hand. "You do look pretty."

El felt herself flush, and butterflies begin to flutter inside her chest, just like it did every time Mike complimented her— a feeling that she loved. "Thanks," she repeated softly, squeezing Mike's hand lightly where she held it in hers, and when he looked her way once more, she grinned and leaned forward to kiss him again, this time on the lips.

When she pulled back she saw that his cheeks had gone a little red, but he played it off quickly. He pushed himself up to his feet and extended a hand down to her to help her up. "Here. We have to catch up with Holly before she wanders off too far."

Instead of taking the proffered hand, she stretched out her arms toward him as if asking him to pick her up. "Piggyback?" she asked with a bright grin, wanting to try this new activity again. She'd liked it a lot. It was fun.

Mike crossed his arms. "Oh, so that's how it's going to be from now on, huh?" he retorted, playfully narrowing his eyes as he looked down at her. "You're just gonna have me carry you everywhere you want to go?"

If she were anyone else she probably would've indicated that was his job as her boyfriend, but El wasn't just everyone else. "I can help, too," she bargained, pointing at her temple to imply that she could always give herself a boost with her powers if he felt she was too heavy. It's not like she wanted him to do all the work on his own.

Mike shook his head and chuckled. "Maybe when we get back to the cabin and there's no risk of tripping on rocks anymore. Now come on, lazy"—he extended his hand down to her again—"you're going to have to use your actual feet at some point."

With a slightly overdramatic sigh and a stretched-out "okaaaaay," she let him pull her to her feet and did not let go of his hand as they walked upstream in the direction Holly had merrily skipped away. She leaned her head against his shoulder as they walked and he told her all about his day at school while Holly danced and twirled a few feet ahead of them.

True to his word, he did carry her the last few yards back home, setting her down on the cabin's porch because he wasn't about to try and go up the steps with her on his back; that was just begging for one or both of them to fall and break their necks. The good thing about it, though, was that standing one or two steps up she was taller than him for once, and she had to lean down to kiss him goodbye. She didn't want him to go but he was technically only supposed to be out for a couple of hours, and it was better for him not to be there when Hopper got home, anyway—Holly did not exactly count as adult supervision for the two of them.

"I'll try to come by with the guys over the weekend. Is Hopper gonna be here?" She nodded, letting him know that Hopper's day off was on

Sunday, so they could probably visit then. "I'll see you Sunday," he said, giving her a kiss on the cheek before turning around to hustle Holly onto his bike. The little girl waved goodbye and El corresponded warmly just as Mike turned his bike around and pedaled away from the cabin.

Thankfully, Sunday wasn't *too* far away.

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Notes: I just wanted Mike to give El a piggyback ride. That's it that's the fic. ټ_(ツ)_/~ Also, a note to the Duffers: Bring back Holly, you cowards.

The *Care Bears* are a group of fictional bears originally created in 1981 by artist Elena Kucharik to be used in a series of greeting cards from American Greetings. The designs were a hit, and throughout the 80s the bears became the center of a multimedia franchise spanning toys, books, TV series, movies, and more.

Yes, your eyes do not deceive you: I live! Still crazy busy so don't expect me to pop up around here too often, but this scene just came to my mind a couple of days ago and I *needed* to get it out of my head. Blame the trailer, probably, since I keep watching reaction videos on Youtube and getting excited about it all over again.

Speaking of the trailer, I *did* record a scene-by-scene breakdown of the trailer, complete with my own commentary and season-three speculation, a few weeks ago for my vlog over at FreakingNarnia dot com. Check it out if you're into that kind of stuff, though I do have to warn you: it's really freaking long. But surely I can't be the only one who can spend an hour and a half talking about a two-minute trailer? xD I know you guys get me when it comes to that kind of stuff. Give it a try and let me know what you think about my ideas.

Be sure to review if you liked this! Figured something spring-ish would be a nice treat. Oh, and happy Easter and Passover to those of you celebrating this weekend. =)